The emergence of Ergonomics in African countries: challenges, issues and development strategies

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The multiple societal changes that African countries face, some observable, others yet to be revealed and more specifically the complex and heterogeneous process of adaptation, appropriation and transformation of work systems to the realities of the countries concerned generate new problems for research other than new training and skills needs. In this context, marked by profound and substantial changes in power relations resulting in the transition from a bipolar to a multipolar world (Wisner et al., 1997), ergonomics falling within the science of work, is certainly a field of research and practice that can play a significant role in this change and the dynamic development of African countries.

Indeed, in this multipolar world, the countries in Africa will no longer be the scene of disputes and the hegemony of economic and financial powers, on the contrary, these countries are developing and industrializing according to political and strategic choices based on sustainable development, with a smart future oriented perspective. Ergonomics can play a significant role in this development, both in the present and the future. Ergonomics can and should be able to assist, guide or warn developing countries on the choices and orientations selected. Ergonomics should not be reduced to a sum of ready-made toolkits, but rather as an approach that falls within the science of action, centered on human activity in the workplace, which when requested to intervene locally,articulates globally and when requested to intervene on the global level, connects to local strategies. Without this dialectic, ergonomics would only be of little use to the development of African countries. On the contrary, countries in Africa risk becoming the scene of disputes concerning the prominent theoretical paradigms to adopt when solving ergonomics problems. This is a real risk to avoid.

African countries are gradually opening up to the world, but that does not mean that they submit to the world. Opening to the world serves to develop synergies, partnerships, networks, exchanges, programs, and projects. In Africa, it is important to seek the best scientific and methodological developments in ergonomics that meet the specific challenges that African countries face:

- draws its roots and inputs from multidisciplinary approaches;
- consider human work in its entirety, in its complexity and not simply as smaller units such as human physical, cognitive, or social dimensions;
- produces knowledge, action and outputs, not only theoretical ergonomics approaches;
- clear focus on the real problems of the countries concerned and on the priorities and meanings that these contexts demand for development;
- finally, African ergonomics demands a humanism that emerges from an understanding of ancestry and heritage that respects African traditions.